

IOWA COMMUNITY FORESTRY AWARD RECIPIENTS HONORED

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DES MOINES - Celebrating tree species diversity and community tree enthusiasts, Iowa natural resources officials recognized outstanding community forestry representatives at a March 30 ceremony.

The 2006 Iowa Urban and Community Forestry Awards Luncheon honored individuals and groups for exceptional work planting, maintaining, and advocating for trees in Iowa communities.

"You are dedicated to planting trees and improving your communities and I want to applaud you for being here," Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Director Jeff Vonk told the audience. "I'm thankful and I encourage you."

This year's ceremony emphasized the importance of diversity in tree species with the theme "Diversity is the Future". Communities that rely too heavily on just a few species of trees can lose many of them due to insect or disease outbreaks, said DNR Urban Forester Randy Cook.

Citizen achievements in urban forestry were recognized with awards in five categories: Outstanding Volunteer, Outstanding Professional, Outstanding Organization, Outstanding Youth Project, and Outstanding Media Partner.

"This is a very nice recognition for all these people who have worked so hard and so selflessly for their communities," said volunteer Mike Giudici, who directs the volunteer-driven Greenway Habitat project in Davenport. "We're all trying to beautify our cities and improve quality of life."

Vonk and DNR Division Administrator Ken Herring also presented "Tree City USA" awards to over 130 communities. That designation, granted by the National Arbor Day Foundation, honors cities and towns for their commitments to all facets of community tree care and management.

"Tree Line USA" recognition went to Alliant Energy, MidAmerican Energy and Waverly Light & Power companies. With this award, the National Arbor Day Foundation honors utility companies for exceptional efforts on behalf of community trees.

Awards also went to three fifth grade artists competing at the state level in the 2006 National Arbor Day Poster Contest. The first place winner's artwork will go on to the national competition.

Paul Wray, a retiring Iowa State University professor of Natural Resource Ecology and Management and Extension Forester, received a special Leadership Award in recognition of his three decades of service.

The awards luncheon occurred roughly four weeks before Arbor Day, which takes place April 28. A proclamation signed by Governor Tom Vilsack declared April 21-28 to be Arbor Week in Iowa.

Three Iowa energy companies - MidAmerican Energy, Alliant Energy, and Aquila -sponsored the event, along with the nonprofit group Trees Forever. The utility companies also donated door prizes to the luncheon, as did individuals and agencies associated with the Iowa Urban and Community Forestry Council.

Members of the Iowa Urban and Community Forestry Council organized the event, while the Telephone Pioneers, a group of retired Bell employees, underwrote Savings Bonds for the poster contest. The Iowa Urban and Community Forestry Program is a cooperative venture involving the Forestry Bureau of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the US Department of Agriculture, and other natural resources groups.

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